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The Relationship between Parental Divorce and First-Year College Student Adjustment
(TITLE)

BY

Jennifer A. Copes

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2007

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

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DATE

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The Relationship between Parental Divorce and First-Year College Student Adjustment

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Science in College
Student Affairs Degree

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The writing of this thesis was an incredible journey of self-discovery. I learned a number of important lessons about myself; I would never have thought I had the perseverance or determination to take on such a daunting process. It taught me that I possess the courage to attempt something entirely outside my comfort zone and the strength to see it through.

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listen with a sympathetic ear, and they celebrated every success right along with me. I appreciate them more than they know and their unwavering support continues to strengthen me.

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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:

The Relationship between Parental Divorce and
First-Year College Student AdjustmentJennifer A. Copes, Master of Science in College
Student Affairs, 2007

Directed By:

Charles G. Eberly, Ph.D.
Professor of Counseling and Student Development

This study was conducted to investigate the potential relationship between incoming freshmen parental marital status and students' first-year adjustment to college. The PI saw a need for this study because of the lack of previous research directly connecting the two above variables. Numerous researchers have investigated the negative effects of parental divorce; the importance of one's parents during the transition to college has also been well documented. For the purpose of this study, the PI sought to examine a potential link between the two, assuming children of divorce would experience more difficulties adjusting to college life than children from intact marriages.

Through various data collection methods, 62 first-year students participated in the study. Students completed a demographic questionnaire about their parental marital status and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). Due to the low sample size, the Kruskal-Wallis rank test for statistical significance was performed. While the results of this study were not statistically significant, the present study adds to the growing body of literature on the topic. Recommendations for future researchers are included as continued investigation is needed. Whether empirically founded or not, parental divorce is an issue that remains salient for children regardless of their age and

student affairs professionals must be aware of the potential adjustment problems that college students could be experiencing.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a widespread phenomenon in America today. The latest available statistics estimate the national marriage rate as 7.5 per 1,000 total population; the divorce rate is estimated to be 3.6 per 1,000 total population, or just under half the marriage rate (*National Center for Health Statistics*, 2005). Every year, more and more children see their parents' marriages crumble and frequently experience the negative side-effects of parental divorce. Researchers have described the consequences of parental divorce on children for years, and many studies have assessed the needs of children from broken homes (Portes, Haas, & Brown, 1991; Luepnitz, 2001; Peris & Emery, 2004; Nair & Murray, 2005; Riggio, 2005). These consequences are felt not only by children who experience parental divorce at a young age; one could argue that neither age nor time ever allows a child to recover fully from parental marital dissolution. Many factors go into how a child survives parental divorce (Kurdek, 1981; Portes, Haas, & Brown, 1991). However, even those who survive have to cope with after-effects of parental divorce for years depending on the severity of the divorce and the degree of family upheaval involved. Issues surrounding parental divorce are still salient for children once they have grown up and become adults, sometimes only becoming apparent when those individuals marry and have children of their own (Bonkowski, 1989).

The question the present study sought to explore was how parental divorce affects those in between youth and adulthood -- specifically, those who are making the transition from child to adult as they begin their first year of college. The intent of the present study was to investigate selected variables that may be related to the parental marital status of

college freshmen and their adjustment to college. The need for this study is clear; during the difficult transition into college (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), students need to have a solid, stable home base to anchor them (Lafreniere & Ledgewood, 1997; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; McCarthy, Moller, & Fouladi, 2001). For most students, this anchor is their nuclear family. Students still dealing with latent issues surrounding parental divorce at home may not be able to navigate the struggles of establishing themselves academically, successfully managing their emotions, and gaining a feeling of independence (Chickering, 1969) during their freshman year nearly as successfully as students from historically stable, unified home backgrounds. It is important, not only for students and parents, but also college student affairs personnel to be aware of implications of parental divorce for college students. The ways in which college student children of divorce cope with developmental challenges during their freshmen year may affect their lives for years to come.

The complex issue of parental divorce and its potential impact on adjustment to college will be explored in the subsequent chapters. Chapter II is a review of literature on both parental divorce and first year college adjustment; Chapter III outlines the quantitative methods of data collection and analysis used in the study; Chapter IV presents results; and Chapter V presents conclusions, implications, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary focus of this chapter is to provide an overview of previous research pertinent to the impact of divorce on college age children. The present study sought to find a relationship between parental divorce and adjustment during the first year of college, therefore literature was reviewed in both these areas.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1988) is the leading theorist studying the importance of children's relationships with their parents. His work on infant parental attachment or parent-child relationships has become a primary theme in the field of child development. Bowlby asserted that the strength of a child's sense of security is contingent on the relationship with his or her parents or, more precisely, the manner in which the child was treated by his or her parents. A secure base is required for children to feel confident and supported; it is necessary for the child to receive "the provision by both parents of a secure base from which a child... can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there" (p. 11). Bowlby also recognized that the phenomenon of parental attachment was not exclusively for children. Although usually less apparent, he stated that attachment is seen "in adolescents and adults of both sexes whenever they are anxious or under stress" (p. 3). Not only does Bowlby's work highlight how essential a secure foundation with parents is to a child's development at an early age, he was able to recognize the importance of parental attachment to children later in life.

Effects of Parental Divorce on Parental Attachment

Though Bowlby (1988) investigated the issues that can disrupt a child's perception of a secure parental base, such as parental death, he did not address the issue of parental divorce. Since Bowlby's seminal work, psychologists have documented the effect that divorce between a child's biological parents has on parent-child attachment during youth (Luepnitz, 2001; Peris & Emery, 2004; Nair & Murray, 2005).

Nair and Murray (2005) administered a number of selected instruments to mothers with preschool-aged children to assess the mothers' stress and depression levels, the degree of conflict in their marriage, their parenting style, and their child's attachment levels. Data from their study suggested that attachment security in children was lower in the cases where the mothers were divorced. Attachment quality was tied to maternal parenting style, and the divorced mothers in this study used a less nurturing parenting style than mothers from intact families. In addition, the researchers found that mothers with a high degree of marital conflict were "more stressed by daily hassles, were more likely to be depressed, expressed a greater need for social support, and experienced more conflict with their spouses" (p. 258-259) than mothers in intact healthy marriages. Linking these two findings, Nair and Murray concluded that children of divorced parents or parents with a high degree of marital conflict were likely to suffer from attachment insecurity as a result of the effect the spousal conflict had on the mother's parenting style. They went a step further than labeling parental conflict as the primary factor affecting parental attachment; Nair and Murray saw maternal psychological variables, such as depression and stress, as the true issues.

Other studies have also shown that a decrease in parental attachment as a result of parental divorce can have damaging psychological effects on children from broken homes. Peris and Emery (2004) compared youth from both intact and what they termed "disrupted" (p. 694) biological families to determine if children of divorce had a predisposition toward various harmful behaviors and the subsequent use of psychological services. Children from disrupted homes exhibited much higher levels of both internalizing behaviors (depression, appetite loss, diminished concentration and feelings of hopelessness, for example) and externalizing behaviors (acts such as stealing, lying, fighting, and drug use). They also found that children from intact households were less likely than their counterparts from disrupted households to seek the services of counselors and psychologists. While Peris and Emery acknowledged that a dysfunctional home environment without the presence of parental divorce can be equally damaging to children, they claimed that "divorce itself sets in motion an array of additional stressors (e.g., economic stability)" (p. 703) beyond the issues a child would experience in a dysfunctional, intact household.

In a qualitative study, Luepnitz (2001) outlined the various coping skills used by children of divorce to avoid effects of their volatile home life. Some of the skills that Luepnitz listed were relatively harmless -- using imagination and elaborate fantasies as a means of escape, for example. However, Luepnitz also identified much more damaging coping mechanisms, such as avoiding time with parents, acting withdrawn, and even "somaticizing" (p. 82) or experiencing physical reactions to their parents' divorce. Somaticizing could include symptoms such as weight loss or gain, vomiting, or the

development of an ulcer. These factors quite possibly could have an adverse effect on parent-child bonds.

Kurdek (1981) hypothesized that four factors influenced how well children adjusted to parental divorce. His work was based on earlier research by Bronfenbrenner (1979), who was one of the first scholars to examine the ways humans adapted to the environment and situations that surrounded them. Kurdek used Bronfenbrenner's general principles of human development and adapted them to children's divorce adjustment. Kurdek's first component was "the macrosystem," (p. 857) or factors such as the child's values, beliefs, and attitudes about families and family functioning in general. The second of Kurdek's components was "the exosystem" (p. 858) which was described as the stability of the post-divorce household and the degree of social support available to the newly divorced family members. Third was "the microsystem" (p. 859) which assessed the nature of the child's own family functioning, both pre- and post-divorce, and also the degree of support available for children. Last was "the ontogenic system" (p. 861) which examined how well equipped the children were to deal with the stress of parental divorce. Kurdek provided a thorough overview of the "cultural, social, familial and individual facets of children's divorce adjustment" (p. 856) and illustrated just how complex and multi-dimensional adjustment to parental divorce can be. With all the above works regarding the difficulties of parental divorce adjustment and the potential harm divorce causes to parent-child bonds, the effects of parental divorce on children and the trauma it can cause are well documented.

Effects of Parental Divorce on College-aged Children

While the majority of research conducted on the effects of parental divorce on offspring has sampled young children, there has been a wide variety of work done assessing the effects of parental divorce on college students (Bonkowski, 1989; Allen, Stoltenberg, & Rosko, 1990; Ensign, Scherman, & Clark, 1998; McCarthy, Brack, Brack, Hsin-tine, & Carlson, 1998; Billingham, Wilson, & Gross, 1999; Short, 2002; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Riggio, 2004). One of the most common threads investigated was the relationship between parental divorce and the social adjustment of college students. Since parental conflict can influence attachment and attachment can influence a person's self-confidence, one could assume that a high degree of parental conflict or a parental divorce would be negatively related to students' social adjustment during transition to college. McCarthy, et al. (1998) claimed that students who came from a less secure, more dysfunctional family base would have significant adjustment difficulties in college. Specifically, students who scored low on a parental attachment indicator scored much higher on a number of other measures related to negative adjustment, such as low self-esteem levels, low life satisfaction, and experiences of negative emotions than those who received high scores on the parental attachment indicator. Short (2003) sought to find a relationship between parental divorce and a number of psychological systems related to college adjustment, such as stress and avoidant coping. Short found that college students with divorced parents were more likely to exhibit antisocial behavior and anxiety surrounding adjustment to college than students from intact families, and were more likely to report being depressed. Using similar methods, Hannum and Dvorak (2004) aimed to discover whether parental divorce (or "family structure") would predict

psychological distress and social adjustment in college freshmen. While their results were inconclusive, the authors discovered that attachment to one's mother and father were the strongest predictors of student psychological distress and social adjustment to college; also, their work concurred with the results of previous research that parental divorce is associated with a decrease in both maternal and paternal attachment.

Billingham, Wilson and Gross (1999) found a relationship between parental divorce and certain irresponsible attitudes toward alcohol consumption. Specifically, the researchers found that students from divorced families were more likely to drink and drive than were students from intact families. In addition, they found that students from divorced families were more likely to have drinking habits that affected their academic progress, such as going to class hung-over or drinking to forget about class assignments. Researchers have also explored the relationship between parental divorce and an effect on the child's own romantic life. Bonkowski's (1989) qualitative study of forty-two young adults demonstrated that children of divorce experienced latent divorce-related issues during their adulthood, such as an increase in uncertainty in their own values regarding marriage, trust and commitment. Ensign, Scherman and Clark (1998) addressed the topic of the quality of intimate relationships for individuals with divorced parents. Their sample consisted of about one hundred randomly selected college juniors and seniors. The researchers used an instrument measuring the students' attitudes on love and sex to determine relationship intimacy. Ensign, et al. found a strong relationship between parental divorce or high parental conflict and low intimacy levels in relationships for the offspring. In other words, as the degree of parental conflict rose, intimacy in students' romantic relationships declined.

As important as the connection between parental divorce and the above factors appear to be, the most important factor in regard to the purpose of the present study is the effect of parental divorce on parental attachment among college-aged children. Not only are parent-child bonds strained during childhood in the presence of parental conflict and divorce, research has also shown that these strains continue to be present once the children are in college. Ensign, Scherman and Clark (1988) examined the negative effect that parental conflict and separation have on parent-child relationships. They found that conflict between one's parents was significantly correlated with a reduction in closeness in the parent-child relationship. Allen, Stoltenberg and Rosko (1990) found similar results when they assessed the effect of parental divorce on psychological separation of young adults from their parents. They found that children of divorce were more likely to have a heightened sense of differentiation from their families than children from intact marriages. Ensign et al. (1998) speculated that this sense of separation was due to the fact that, as parents became engrossed in their own conflict, the child began to feel ignored and sought support elsewhere. This assertion was supported by Riggio (2004), who noted that parents engaged in continuous conflict with one another had less time for effective parenting and often displayed their feelings of aggression for their spouse to their children. This display of anger would be one possible explanation for a strain on parent-child relations.

It is clear that parental divorce is a life event that does not affect children at only one age and in only one way. Parental divorce is a traumatic life experience that remains with the children whose lives it disrupts, and its effect carries over into multiple areas of their lives for many years.

Adjustment to College

The freshman year of college is considered to be one of the most radical times of change in a young adult's life (Dyson & Renk, 2006; Lafreniere & Ledgerwood, 1997; Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999). Many factors influence how young adults transition to their first year of college. Dyson and Renk (2006) explained this period of confusion for new college students as "extended adolescence" (p. 1231), as these incoming students tend to consider themselves neither children nor adults while they search for their new identity. Dyson and Renk examined how gender, stress levels, and coping strategies of incoming freshmen affected their levels of depression, and therefore their level of adjustment to their first year. In both male and female first-year students the level of stress surrounding adjustment to college was a strong predictor of their use of avoidant coping skills. In addition, the higher their stress, the more likely college students were to be depressed. Martin, Swartz-Kulstad and Madson (1999) aimed to identify which psychosocial factors influenced adjustment to college. Martin et al. surveyed their sample in the areas of gender, age, cultural identity, attitude toward the university, social life and much more. Martin, et al. found that that a positive attitude toward the university was one of the most important factors to successful adjustment, followed closely by academic self-confidence and faculty support.

Importance of Parental Support for Successful College Adjustment

Virtually every study conducted on first year adjustment to college mentioned the important role that parents played in the process (Lafreniere & Ledgerwood, 1997; Wintre & Yaffe, 2000; McCarthy, Moller, & Fouladi, 2001). Just as Bowlby asserted that a strong bond with one's parents was essential for transitioning through important

milestones during youth, a secure parental base is equally important during life's later transitions, such as adjustment to university life. Lafreniere and Ledgerwood (1997) investigated the impact that family support has on a child's adjustment to college. They described this time in the lives of young adults as "a unique and significant challenge that can lead to stress and adjustment difficulties" (p. 14) as they wrestled with the issues of leaving home and their newfound independence from their parents. In their study of 100 first-year college students, Lafreniere and Ledgerwood asked participants to complete a perceived stress level instrument and a perceived parental support instrument. When analyzing the data, they found that students who perceived a high level of support from their parents received a significantly lower score on a stress scale instrument than students who perceived a low level of parental support. McCarthy, Moller, and Fouladi (2001) investigated the connection between perceived family support and two other variables, perceived stress levels and ability to cope with stress, in a sample of 235 participants from a large southwestern university. They found that participants with higher levels of parental support reported lower stress and better ability to regulate moods, which in turn facilitated their adjustment to college. Wintre and Yaffe (2000) also found that a strong parent-child relationship was a significant predictor for successful adaptation to college. Similar to Lafreniere and Ledgerwood, McCarthy et al. (2001) discovered that students who reported high levels of parental support had both lower levels of perceived stress and greater amounts of confidence in coping with stress and regulating their moods.

Summary

Taking all the above research into account, one can see a number of general themes emerge. Research involving participants of all ages show that parental divorce has a detrimental effect on offspring, often resulting in a decrease of attachment to parents. It has also been shown that successful college adjustment rests heavily on a child's perception of support as a function of their relationship with their parents. Therefore, one could postulate that entering college freshmen who experienced parental divorce earlier in life will have a more difficult time adjusting to college than students from intact families. Using these themes, it was the goal of this study to investigate the potential correlation between parental divorce and college adjustment. It is hypothesized that first-semester freshmen students who have experienced parental divorce will face more adjustment challenges than their peers with parents from intact marriages.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used in the present quantitative study of the potential effect of parental divorce on first-year student adjustment to college. This section will describe in greater detail the study's research design, sample population, and instruments used.

Research Design

For this study, the PI decided to employ a correlational quantitative design as opposed to interviewing a snowball sample of college student children of divorce in a qualitative research design (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). As already stated, parental divorce is a complex issue the consequences of which on children are challenging to quantify. A correlational research design using paper instruments was selected for the present study since this study aimed to investigate the potential relationship between two variables, parental divorce and subsequent first-year college adjustment of their offspring. Perhaps a more in-depth analysis of the intricacies of parental divorce could have been explored through life-history participant interviews or other qualitative measures, but developing grounded theory was not the focus of this study.

Participants

Participants in the present study were all volunteer first-year freshmen students at a mid-sized mid-western state university. There were no selection restrictions based on race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status of the volunteer student participants. The only requirements for participation in the study were that participants were classified as freshmen and that their parents' divorce occurred after age five but before age sixteen.

The rationale behind the latter restriction was that, for the purpose of this study, it was necessary for the divorce to be completed so students were truly living in a post-divorce climate, but they needed to clearly remember the events of the divorce. Allowing participants who either cannot remember their parents' divorce because they were too young or cannot comment on the post-divorce climate because the divorce was still in progress would have confounded the purpose of this study.

Participants for the present study were all current second semester freshmen living in University Housing at the host university. A first round of survey administrations occurred within a residence hall that housed a total of 638 freshmen students. The PI attended a building-wide program organized by the Residence Hall Council where 20 useable surveys were collected from participants. The PI also solicited help from the freshmen hall resident assistant staff members, providing all seventeen RAs with five surveys each. The RAs had three weeks to solicit respondents from their floor to complete the research instruments. From that attempt, 28 useable surveys were collected. The PI also utilized two RAs in a women's residence hall housing a mix of first-time first year and upper class female students. The two RAs who helped with data collection were chosen because of the high percentage of first-time first year women living on their floor. Each RA was provided ten surveys, and after one week nine useable surveys were collected.

After experiencing such low return rates on the two previous survey administration attempts, a third attempt at data collection was conducted among freshmen males involved in fraternities at the host institution ($N = 19$). After data collection was

completed and unusable responses were discarded, a total of 67 responses were available for analysis.

Instrumentation

The two variables of interest for the present study were adjustment to college and parental marital status. For the first variable of interest, freshmen student adjustment to college, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) was used (Baker & Siryk, 1989). This 67-item, Likert-scale questionnaire assessed students' perceptions of their own adjustment to college in four different areas, or subscales. These subscales were academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and goal commitment/institutional adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1986). As described by the instrument's creators, "the SACQ is designed to assess how well a student is adapting to the demands of the college experience" (Baker & Siryk, 1989, p. 4). To establish reliability and validity, Baker and Siryk administered the SACQ to students in four consecutive classes of incoming freshmen at Clark University from 1980 to 1983. Both validity and reliability were established, finding strong intercorrelations between the subscales and the Full Scale (Eleventh Mental Measurements Yearbook, 1992, p. 383). Full Scale reliability coefficients were exceptionally high, ranging from .92 to .95 (p. 384). Reliability is equally strong among the subscales. Values for the academic adjustment subscale range from .81 to .90, for the social adjustment subscale from .83 to .91, for the personal-emotional adjustment subscale from .77 to .86, and for the goal commitment/institutional adjustment subscale from .85 to .91 (Baker & Siryk, 1989, p. 34).

At the time, reviewers of the SACQ were concerned that results from the norm group used by Baker and Siryk would not be applicable to dissimilar institutions and should be "used with caution outside of its norm population area" (p. 384). However, the current SACQ manual contains intercorrelation data for various administrations of the SACQ at over 21 different colleges and universities, all of differing size, location, and student body demographics (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Baker and Siryk have consistently found results comparable to their original Clark University data from subsequent administrations of the SACQ. There is clear evidence that not only is the SACQ a reliable and valid assessment of first-year college student adjustment, but it is an instrument whose results are highly applicable to a wide variety of populations.

To assess the second variable of the study, parental marital status, participants completed a demographic questionnaire created by the PI (Appendix I). The questionnaire asked participants for general demographic information, such as gender and age, and more in depth information regarding their parents' current marital situation.

Analysis of Data

Prior to data collection, a plan for data analysis was created to test the directional hypothesis that children of divorce would have lower adaptation to college scores than children of intact marriages. The PI, anticipating a large number of student respondents ($N > 150$), planned to use a multiple analysis of variance (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 383) to compare overall SACQ adjustment scores to respondents' parental marital status. In addition, to determine if parents' marital status influenced specific adjustment sub-scales, the PI planned to use the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS Inc., 1999) to compute a two-way ANOVA. However, since the

total sample size in this study was much smaller than anticipated and the data collected were disproportionately from children of intact marriages, a different method of data analysis employing non-parametric procedures had to be employed.

Because of the small sample size, one could not assume an underlying normal distribution and a standard ANOVA could not be used. As a result, the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance by ranks was employed to analyze the results of this study (Rosenthal, 2001, p. 415). The Kruskal-Wallis (H) test was used because it is a non-parametric test where assumptions about normality and equality cannot be met (*Kruskal-Wallis Test*, texasoft.com, ¶3).

Results of the study are reported in Chapter IV, and a discussion of the implications and conclusions drawn from the study are reported in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

After data collection was completed, 70 second semester, first-year students at the mid-western comprehensive host institution participated in the study. Of those 70, three unusable surveys were discarded. Of the remaining 67, 10 participants self-identified as having divorced parents or parents currently going through the divorce process. Fifty-two students selected "currently married" as their parents' marital status. Four participants claimed to have one parent deceased and one participant chose "other," so those responses were removed for purposes of data analysis. After subtracting the participants who did not match the study criteria, the final sample used in the analysis (N) became 62, with $N_a = 52$ and $N_b = 10$.

For statistical analysis, the Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test for analysis of variance was the only option; due to the small sample size and the disproportionate sample results, a normal parametric ANOVA or *t* test would have yielded inaccurate results. A total of five Kruskal-Wallis tests were performed comparing children of intact marriages with children of divorce on the full scale SACQ results and each of four SACQ subscales. None of the analyses showed a statistically significant difference between the SACQ scores of children from intact marriages versus those from divorced households. The full scale SACQ score analysis was $H = 50.090$, $df = 54$, and $p = .626$. For the academic adjustment subscale, the result of the analysis was $H = 42.817$, $df = 47$, and $p = .646$. For the social adjustment subscale, the Kruskal-Wallis $H = 34.938$, $df = 43$, and $p = .804$. On the personal-emotional adjustment subscale, $H = 41.605$, $df = 42$, and $p = .488$. Lastly, for the attachment subscale, $H = 24.716$, $df = 34$, and $p = .878$.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to be exploratory in nature as opposed to seeking a causal relationship between parental marital status and college adjustment. The quality of a student's relationship with his or her parents is determined by a complex web of contributing factors, only one of which is parental marital status. While the present study investigated the potential connection between parental divorce and first-year adjustment to university life, the intent was not to insinuate a causal relationship. A convenience sample of 67 first-time first-year students participated by completing both a researcher designed demographic questionnaire on their parental marital status and an empirically tested standardized instrument addressing student adjustment, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ).

After data collection was completed and invalid surveys were removed, participants were divided into two groups, children from intact marriages ($N_a = 52$) and children of divorce ($N_b = 10$). The original hypothesis of the PI was that children of divorce would have lower SACQ scores than children of intact marriages. Due to a low sample size, a standard analysis of variance could not be performed since a normal distribution in the underlying data could not be assumed. Thus, the Kruskal-Wallis rank test was used and the original hypothesis had to be changed to a null hypothesis (meaning that the full scale and subscale SACQ scores would not differ among participants based on parental marital status). After analyzing the data using the Kruskal-Wallis test, results were found not to reach significance, and the null hypothesis of no difference between

children from intact marriages and children of divorce in terms of measured SACQ college adjustment was not rejected.

The primary limitation of this study was its low sample size. A larger sample size would have reduced the disparity between children of divorce and children of intact marriages. The seven empirical studies cited in the "Effects of Parental Divorce on College-Age Students" portion of the Review of Literature, all which found a negative relationship between parental divorce and a second variable, had a sample size of no smaller than 95 participants (Allen, Stoltenberg & Rosko, 1990; Ensign, Sherman & Clark, 1998; McCarthy, Brack, Brack, Hsin-tine & Carlson, 1998; Billingham, Wilson & Gross, 1999; Short, 2002; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; Riggio, 2004). Allen, Stoltenberg and Rosko (1990) surveyed 160 college freshmen, all of whom were enrolled in a introductory psychology course and received course credit for participating, to investigate the role of parental divorce in "the process of adolescent psychological separation" (p. 57) from parents. Out of the 160 students surveyed, only 38 participants were children of divorce. The authors used multiple standardized instruments, including the SACQ, to assess the relationship between the two variables. The authors performed a MANOVA ($F(14,145) = 1.91, p < .0298$) and discovered that children of divorce were significantly more separated from or less reliant on their parents than children from intact marriages. Ensign, Sherman and Clark (1998) analyzed data from 101 total participants "randomly selected from a university telephone directory" (§ 7). Only 39 participants were children of divorced parents. The authors found in their ANOVA ($F(1,49) = 6.451, p < .05$) that conflict among parents led to a decreased relationship intimacy in "romantic relationships" (§ 13) among children of divorce compared to children of intact marriages.

McCarthy et al. analyzed data from 254 college students recruited through an undergraduate psychology class to assess the relationship between family conflict and students' attachment to parents. Using ANOVA ($F(16,418) = 1.67, p = .05$), McCarthy et al. found a significant interaction between parental attachment and the students' gender. They also discussed that this link might be due to the different ways male and female offspring react to parental conflict. Billingham, Wilson and Gross (1999) conducted a large-scale university study including 1,495 participants, only 382 of whom were children of divorce, to assess the effect of parental marital status on student drinking habits. Using ANOVA ($F(1) = 4.67, p < 0.5$), the researchers discovered that children of divorced were more likely to engage in risky drinking behaviors or experience negative consequences of drinking than students from intact families. Short (2002) surveyed 241 students, 87 of whom identified as being children of divorce, 87 of whom were children of intact marriages, and 67 of whom had experienced a parental death, to investigate the relationship between certain psychological factors, such as stress, family conflict, avoidant coping, and perceptions of support, and parental marital status. Using ANOVA ($F(1,85) = 8.35, p < .01$), Short found that children of divorced parents experienced significantly more psychological stress than children of married parents or those with one or more deceased parents.

[C]hildren of divorced parents reported significantly more life stress, family conflict, avoidant coping, antisocial behavior, anxiety, and depression, and less supportive parenting in childhood and less current family cohesion and friend support than children of married parents and children of a deceased parent (p. 148 – 149).

Hannum and Dvorak (2004) used multiple regression methods to analyze data from 95 freshman students, 16 of whom were children of divorce, on their psychological distress and social adjustment based on the degree of family conflict, divorce, and attachment patterns. Overall, the multiple correlation for family structure ($R^2 = .259$, $\beta = .223$; $p < .03$) indicated participants from intact families adjusted better than participants from "divorced/remarried families" (p. 35). Riggio (2004) surveyed 566 young adults, both undergraduate and graduate students who received extra credit as an incentive to participate, to assess whether parental divorce played a role in the degree of affective quality and emotional support children have with their parents. Of the 566 students surveyed, only 165 identified as children of divorce. Using ANOVA, Riggio found that children of divorce reported experiencing significantly lower emotional support from their fathers ($F(1,556) = 27.65$, $p < .001$) and greater emotional support in relationships with their mothers ($F(1,556) = 3.46$, $p < .07$) than children from intact marriages. It is clear that while these researchers may have been more successful at recruiting research participants than the PI in the present study, most previous researchers also experienced the same disproportionate response rate from children of divorce versus children of intact marriages. Thus, while a larger sample size would have allowed the PI in this study to use more straightforward statistical procedures such as an ANOVA, as opposed to the Kruskal-Wallis rank test, the unbalanced subgroups within the sample might still have been a threat to validity.

Suggestions for Future Research

It is important to note that the lack of significant results may not reflect what is actually true in the underlying population represented by the participants in this study. A

larger sample size could very well have found a differential relationship between parental marital status and first-year college adjustment (Farber, 1980; Matthews, 1992). Future researchers should allow enough time for data collection to recruit a large respondent sample. Diverse avenues of data collection should be explored such as recruiting respondents from first year experience college adjustment or psychology courses (Allen, Stoltenberg & Rosko, 1990; McCarthy, Brack, Brack, Hsin-tine, & Carlson, 1998; Billingham, Wilson & Gross, 1999; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004), randomly selecting participants from university directories (Ensign, Scherman & Clark, 1998) or collecting data as part of a larger university-sponsored research study (Riggio, 2004).

In addition to enhancing the significance of the study through diverse avenues of data collection, the PI suggests that research augmenting the present study be conducted longitudinally. A number of current researchers have identified the benefits of studying the effect of parental divorce longitudinally (Ahrons, 2007; Huurre, Junkkari, & Aro, 2006). Assessing the relationship between parental divorce and the quality of students' entire college experience (ie., following them throughout their matriculation) would provide a wealth of knowledge to the field.

Another suggestion for future researchers would be to investigate a dynamic that this study was unable to explore due to limitations in the research design - how the quality of students' relationships with their parents may be related to their adjustment to the freshmen year in college. For the purpose of this study, the PI chose to use the participants' scores on the SACQ as one variable and their parental marital status as the other (divorced versus intact). The PI originally chose these two variables based on previous research; a number of studies already linked parental divorce with other

negative factors, such as a decrease in parental attachment (Allen, Stoltenberg, & Rosko, 1990; McCarthy, Brack, Brack, Hsin-tine, & Carlson, 1998; Nair & Murray, 2005), an increase in harmful behaviors of offspring (Peris & Emery, 2004) and difficulty establishing their own intimate relationships in adulthood (Ensign, Scherman, & Clark, 1998; Riggio, 2004). However, all of the studies cited above did not address the possibility that parent-child bonds can be strained in the absence of parental divorce. It is certainly possible for children of intact marriages to have a poor relationship with their parents because of a number of intervening factors, just as it is possible for children of divorce to feel supported and loved by their parents, despite the marital dissolution. The quality of the relationship with one's parents or the degree of parental attachment is certainly an avenue that should be explored by future researchers. The PI suggests that any future attempts to investigate a relationship between the above two variables should be done so by combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The validity of instruments like the SACQ cannot be overlooked (Baker & Siryk, 1986), but taking time to conduct qualitative life-history interviews would give future researchers greater insight as to how specific participants gauged their relationship with their own parents, as well as how parental conflict in general can affect children. The qualitative "grounded theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006) resulting from such a mixed methods research design would inform future researchers as they work to ask better questions.

Suggestions for Student Affairs Practitioners

Professionals in the field of student affairs are often considered the "front line" when it comes to identifying and assessing the needs of students. If the national divorce rate remains at its current level, practitioners can expect that students who are children of

divorce will arrive on campus bringing with them a host of issues related to their parents' marital dissolution for years to come. In recent decades, elementary and secondary schools have begun to implement counseling programs for youth dealing with parental divorce (Crespi, Gustafson, & Borges, 2005; Yauman, 1991). In fact, research has shown that both young children (Crespi, Gustafson, & Borges, 2005; Richardson & Rosen, 1999) and older adults (Quinney & Fouts, 2003) struggling with issues surrounding parental divorce can benefit greatly from a counseling intervention; thus, it is clear that counseling intervention will be valuable to college-aged children of divorce. The PI recommends that college and university counseling centers begin to investigate how a group counseling program for students with divorced parents could be adapted to their campus. Other campus offices should also explore how to incorporate support for children of divorce into their daily functioning. Student activities offices could provide films or lecture series focused on the issue of parental divorce. Residence life offices could specially train their housing staff to identify the warning signs of students struggling with parental divorce. There is no limit to the ways a university campus could integrate parental divorce support systems into its student affairs division, and the benefit would be more well-adjusted, happier students.

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APPENDIX I
SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Sample Demographic Questionnaire

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

SURVEY - QUESTIONNAIRE FORM

IMPORTANT DIRECTIONS
FOR MARKING ANSWERS

- Do NOT USE PENS.
- Make heavy black marks that completely fill circle.
- Erase clearly any answer you change.
- Make no stray marks.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS

Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: Please select the items below that best describe you and your current parental marital status.

CODES									
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9

1. Gender:

a = Female; b = Male

a b c d e

2. Age:

a = 17; b = 18; c = 19; d = 20; e = 21

3. What is your birth order?

a = Only child; b = Oldest child; c = Middle child; d = Youngest child;

e = Other - please write in response on line below:

4. What is the status of your biological/adoptive parents?

a = Currently married; b = Currently in the divorce process; c = Divorced;
 d = One is deceased; e = Both are deceased; f = Never married;
 g = Other - please write in response on line below:

For the respondents who selected an option other than "Divorced" for question number 4, you are finished with this questionnaire.

5. For the respondents who selected "Divorced" for questions number 4, was the divorce finalized after you were 5 (five) years of age, but before you were 16 (sixteen)?

a = Yes; b = No

For the respondents who selected "No" for question number 5, you are finished with this questionnaire.

6. For the respondents who selected "Yes" for question number 5, how old were you when the divorce was finalized?

a = 5 - 7 years old; b = 8 - 10 years old; c = 11 - 13 years old; d = 14 - 16 years old

7. For the respondents who marked "Divorced," for questions number 4, please choose the best fit to describe your biological parents' remarriage status.

a = Neither parent has yet to remarry; b = One parent has remarried, one has not;
 c = Both parents have remarried

8. For the respondents who marked "Divorced," please choose the best fit to describe your parents' post-divorce custody arrangement.

a = Joint custody; b = Full custody - Mother; c = Full custody - Father;
 d = Other - please write in response on line below:

CONTINUED ON REVERSE SIDE

APPENDIX II
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

This study is designed to examine the potential correlation between freshmen adjustment to college and parental marital status (children of divorce versus children from intact marriages). Your responses on both the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) and the Demographic Questionnaire will be kept completely confidential and anonymous, so your honest answers are appreciated. No names will be recorded and all documents will be destroyed following data collection and analysis. You may elect to withdraw from this study at any time.

If you have questions about this study or its purpose, please contact me, Jennifer Copes, principal investigator, at 581-2015 or jacopes@eiu.edu. You may also contact my thesis director, Dr. Charles Eberly, at 581-7786 or cgeberly@eiu.edu.

Consent to participate: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

☐ Participant Copy

☐ Researcher Copy